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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, PM/RSAT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2017
TAGS: PREL MO
SUBJECT: MOROCCO WANTS TO PURCHASE F-16S

REF: A. SECRETARY GATES LETTER TO KING MOHAMMED VI
1B. RABAT 576

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Inspector General of the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) General Abdelaziz Bennani, Morocco's Chief of Defense Equivalent, telephoned the Ambassador late evening September 16 to inform that Morocco decided to select the F-16 aircraft to upgrade its aging fighter fleet.

12. (S) Subsequently, in a September 17 meeting with visiting Commander U.S. Air Forces Europe General Tom Hobbins, General Bennani reaffirmed Morocco's decision to purchase the F-16. Out of the five options previously presented to the Moroccan military, the GOM has elected to pursue the purchase of 24 new "block 50" fighters, Bennani said. General Bennani also requested that the transaction be completed as soon as possible, preferably by December. The Moroccan side did not discuss financing.

13. (S) Comment: This Embassy and the USG have exerted major efforts (refs) to secure a F-16 sale and we see this as a solid commitment. However, the source of financing for the purchase is still uncertain. Rumors continue to float regarding potential sponsorship from one of Morocco's Gulf allies, perhaps Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. If true, we expect this to be reflected in Morocco's financing request.

14. (S) Comment Contd: We understand Algeria has begun receiving some of the advanced fighter aircraft that prompted the GOM to itself seek advanced fighters. We request that Washington agencies do everything possible to satisfy the Moroccan request to expedite the sale. Another consideration: We want to lock in this sale in the face of still serious French competition. End Comment.

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